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February 18, 1958

Dr. F. M. Burnet
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Parkville, N.2., Australia

Dear Mac:

Dr. French

*airmail
You will doubtless hear from Eric about a photo copy of an article which I am sending him from a current issue of the Journal of Bacteriology. The occasion prompts me to make the following comment which I hope is not out of order.

At the conclusion of our Fulbright visit, we were asked to make a report to Canberra on the scientific scene in Australia and in particular to try to point to specific ways in which communications between other countries and Australia might be improved. I don't have to stress that we are all already so firmly connected in a common scientific community that one does have to look for opportunities for improvement. The occasion of my letter to Eric does however remind me of one such gap. It occurs to me that you might be the best qualified person in Australia to improve the situation if you concurred on the importance of doing so.

I got the impression during our visit that a proportion of your countrymen in science suffered from a definite sense of isolation so that they would be motivated much more than workers in other countries to make frequent travel visits, etc. I think this is a well recognized feature of Australian scientific life and one that, for example, the CSIRO makes a regular feature in its appointments. I certainly would not want to depreciate the usefulness of frequent personal travel. However, it seems to me that the need for it could be very much less urgent if the exchange of scientific journals were improved.

I know from my own experience during the visit that it might take as long as three to four months, if not more, for certain journals to reach the libraries in Australia. This can be a very frustrating situation especially for people working in the most active fields of current research. The article which I sent to Eric is a case in point and I can visualize that he might have spent another three or four months of work that was unnecessary in the sense of duplicating something already published if it were not for this opportunity of passing it on to him. This is obviously a very unsatisfactory technique.

Don't you think then that an excellent investment for the improvement of scientific communication to and in Australia would be a few thousand pounds spent on hurrying the scientific periodicals to Australia by airmail. If not that, then by some system of microfilming and redistribution in Australia. I know that I would feel a rather considerable sense of desolation if I knew that I was constantly from four to six months behind the work that had already been published elsewhere on top of the delay inherent in publications itself. I cannot think that this is inherently a problem of finance but I suggest that it is rather a matter of someone getting busy to arrange to organization. If it were primarily a matter of foreign exchange, I should think it would not be impossible to obtain some

help at least on the American side for the subsidy of rapid shipment of American journals to Australia. I would certainly not be diffident about

approaching say the Rockefeller Foundation with such a proposal or if not that, even some of the agencies of the government here. In fact, I am taking the liberty of sending a copy of this letter to Dr. Wallace Brode who is the new science advisor in the State Department.* This is, of course, just an informal matter and I hope will not embarrass anyone as it might if it were some sort of official communication. In any case, this letter simply represents my own views and is nothing more than a restatement of what was already in the Fulbright report.

Since you will be in the United States within the next few months, I thought it might be well to bring this matter to your attention in the hope that the occasion might arise that something could be done about it. I am of course motivated only by the hope of maintaining the most ~~possible~~^{cordial} contact with my colleagues in Australia with whom I had such a good and fruitful time during my visit.

I hope we will have some quiet time together when we meet somewhere in the United States where we can talk about science as well as policy.

With all best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

** have thought better +
will wait.*



Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Medical Genetics